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A Not-for-Profit Veterans Service Organization Chartered by the United States Congress

July 10, 2017

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
2208 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congressman Thornberry,

Vietnam Veterans of America would like to express our full support for the Protecting Military Honor Act. This critical legislation will strengthen the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2017 by improving processes of correcting military records, strengthening military whistleblower protections, and ensuring fairer treatment for service members and veterans who experience retaliation or wrongful discharge after being sexually assaulted.

The Protecting Military Honor Act will bring the military burden of proof standard in line with best practices and federal civilian standards so victims have a fair opportunity to make their claim. It would also extend safeguards against improper mental health discharges that prevent veterans from accessing health care or disability benefits.

Veterans who wish to change their discharge papers must turn to the Boards for Correction of Military Records (BCMR) and the Discharge Review Boards (DRB), but presenting an effective upgrade request is very difficult, and the Boards are extremely difficult to access. The Protecting Military Honor Act would address these perpetual system failures by ensuring veterans have adequate access to due process regarding a discharge upgrade by expanding the jurisdiction of DRBs and increasing accessibility to hearings through audio and video technology. This legislation would also require BCMR and DRB decisions to be searchable online for survivors to refer to in building their cases, and would enhance judicial review of incorrect or improper Board decisions.

We urge the committee to support this legislation and to include report language to emphasize the importance of the inclusion of advocates from military, veteran and family service organizations in the DoD working group described in Section 9.

The Protecting Military Honor Act is a vital piece of legislation that would provide much needed protections to the tens of thousands of people who have been wrongfully discharged in the past in relation to military sexual trauma. We look forward to working with Congress to ensure its expeditious passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be "John", is written below the word "Sincerely,".

John Rowan
National President